

May 22, 1996

## NCS RECORDS AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** To establish National Cemetery System (NCS) policy for the creation, maintenance, and disposition of Federal records.
- 2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS:** This directive prescribes policy related to the creation, maintenance and disposition of NCS VACO records, NCAO records and national cemetery records. This directive:
  - a. Establishes the records and information management responsibilities for all management levels in NCS.
  - b. Provides definitions of terms pertaining to records and information management.
  - c. Identifies the NCS VACO official and alternate(s) to serve as FOIA/Privacy Act Officer and Records Officer in accordance with the VA Directive 6300, Managing Records and Information.
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** NCS Administration Service (402D), 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420, is responsible for the material contained in this directive.
- 4. RELATED HANDBOOK:** NCS Handbook 6300, NCS Records and Information Management, and NCS Records Control Schedule (RCS) for the National Cemetery System VA Central Office, RCS for National Cemetery Area Offices, and RCS for National Cemeteries.
- 5. RESCISSIONS:** None

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Distribution: RPC 4016  
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## NCS RECORDS AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

**1. PURPOSE:** This directive provides NCS policy for the creation, maintenance, and disposition of Federal records. The statutory authority for disposition of records for this directive is stated in the Federal Records Act of 1950 as amended and codified in title 44 United States Code, Chapters 21, 29, 31 33 and 35.

**2. POLICY:**

a. Policy for the organization, maintenance and use, and disposition of records within VA is contained in MP-1, Part II, Chapter 1, Paperwork Management. This MP is currently being written as a directive by the Office of Information Resources Management and will be entitled "VA Directive 6300, Records and Information Management." Federal regulations for records are based on the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), title 36, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Chapter XII, subchapter B; Federal Information Resources Management Regulation, title 41, Code of Federal Regulations, Chapter 201; and the Paperwork Reductions Act of 1995.

b. Official files will be classified and arranged in subject-numeric order in accordance with OI-1, Part I, Chapter 4, Appendix B, VA Subject-Numeric Classification System, and OI-1, Part I, Chapter 4, Appendix C, VA File Maintenance System. The official records will be maintained only in designated official file stations.

c. The official files will be maintained on a calendar or fiscal year basis, as most appropriate.

d. Project or case files are a part of, and will remain under the jurisdiction of, the appropriate official file station.

e. The chronological, reading, and/or working files maintained within an agency or staff office are nonrecord materials and should be promptly disposed of when their purpose has been served in accordance with current records control schedules.

f. Federal law and related regulations require that agency officials and personnel be made aware of established procedures for maintaining personal papers and ensuring the security and integrity of official records.

g. Records control schedules (RCS) are required by Federal statute and the instructions contained in them are mandatory. NCS (VACO and field) records will be disposed of in accordance with designated records control schedules.

h. Unlawful removal and/or destruction of records in agency custody is governed by specific provisions of 44 U.S.C., Chapter 31 with criminal penalties provided for under 18 U.S.C. 2071.

**3. RESPONSIBILITIES:**

a. Good records and information management practices are the responsibility at every level in NCS to ensure compliance with MP-1, Part II, Chapter 1, Paperwork Management until VA Directive 6300, Records and Information Management has been revised by the office of the Director, Information Management Service (045A4).

b. NCS, Administration Service (402D) is responsible for the establishment and designation of official file station(s) within NCS VACO and for the proper maintenance and disposition of official records.

c. National Cemetery Area Office (NCAO) Directors are responsible for designating officials in each NCS area office to serve as the Area Office FOIA/PA Officer and Records Officer. FOIA/PA Officer and

Records Officer are responsible for ensuring that their office and the cemeteries under their jurisdiction are in compliance with the provisions of this directive.

d. Cemetery Directors are responsible for managing official records at their facility and obtaining guidance from their Area Office FOIA/PA Officer and Records Officer.

e. The NCS VACO Records Officer is the Chief, Support Services Division, Administration Service (402D2). The operation and technical control of the official file stations are the responsibility of the person designated to serve as Records Officer.

f. The NCS FOIA/PA Officer and Alternate are staff members of the Communications Division, Executive Communications and Public Affairs Service (402B). The FOIA/PA Officer and alternate will:

(1) Provide guidance and support to all NCS staff including those in Central Office, Area Offices and National Cemeteries on all matters related to the release of information by:

(a) Being familiar with all laws and VA regulations concerning the release of information.

(b) Maintaining a uniform listing of FOIA/PA requests received to prepare an annual report.

(c) Reviewing all initial requests for records submitted under FOIA/PA. Make determinations to grant or deny the request and whether to charge the requester fees for complying with the request.

(d) Ensuring that responses to requests include, if applicable, the statutory reason for nondisclosure of information and a full description of how and where to file an appeal.

(2) Serve as NCS primary liaison to the designated Department wide FOIA/PA official and the Office of General Counsel for all matters involving FOIA/PA.

#### **4. REFERENCES:**

a. Records Control Schedules for the National Cemetery System VACO; National Cemetery Area Offices; and National Cemeteries, 3/89

b. OI-1, Part I, Chapter 2, Appendix A, Disposition of CO Records, 6/30/87

c. OI-1, Part I, Chapter 4, Appendix B, VA Subject-Numeric Classification Guide, VA File Maintenance System, 2/14/84

d. OI-1, Part I, Chapter 4, VA Central Office File Maintenance System, 4/20/84

e. OI-1, Part I, Chapter 4, Appendix C, VA File Maintenance System, 7/18/77

f. MP-1, Part II, Chapter 1, Paperwork Management

g. National Archives and Records Administration, Records Management Handbook, Disposition of Federal Records, 1992

At this time both the MP and the OI-1 listed above are being rewritten into Directives and Handbooks by VA elements outside of NCS.

## NCS RECORDS AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

1. **REASON FOR ISSUE:** To establish National Cemetery System (NCS) procedures for the creation, maintenance and disposition of records.
2. **SUMMARY OF CONTENTS:** This handbook prescribes procedures related to the creation, maintenance, and disposition of records.
3. **RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** Administration Service (402D), NCS, is responsible for the material contained in this handbook.
4. **RELATED DIRECTIVE:** NCS Directive 6300, NCS Records and Information Management.
5. **RESCISSIONS:** NONE

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NCS RECORDS AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

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**RECORDS AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT****SECTION I - INTRODUCTION****1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE**

a. Records and Information Management (RIM) entails the planning, controlling, directing, organizing, training, promoting, and other managerial activities involved with respect to records creation, records maintenance and use, and records disposition. RIM is the creation-to-disposition life cycle of Federal records, and is vital to the effective management of an agency and to ensure that the Federal agencies are adequately documenting/appraising their records. This handbook contains procedures for RIM throughout the National Cemetery System (NCS).

b. RIM must provide for effective controls over the creation, maintenance and use of records in the conduct of current business; apply the standards and guidelines developed by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) as well as Department standards, procedures, and techniques designed to improve the management of records, promote the maintenance and security of records deemed appropriate for preservation and facilitate the segregation and disposal of records of temporary value; and ensure that records are preserved that contain adequate and proper documentation of the organization, functions, procedures, and essential transactions of the agency and designed to furnish the information necessary to protect the legal and financial rights of the Government and of persons directly affected by the Department of Veterans Affairs' activities.

c. NCS Records Control Schedules and VACO Records management handbooks and instructional guides include the following:

(1) Records Control Schedules for the National Cemetery System VACO; National Cemetery Area Offices; and National Cemeteries, 3/89

(2) OI-1, Part I, Chapter 2, Appendix A, Disposition of CO Records, 6/30/87

(3) OI-1, Part I, Chapter 4, Appendix B, VA Subject-Numeric Classification Guide, VA File Maintenance System, 2/14/84

(4) OI-1, Part I, Chapter 4, VA Central Office File Maintenance System, 4/20/84

(5) OI-1, Part I, Chapter 4, Appendix C, VA File Maintenance System, 7/18/77

(6) MP-1, Part II, Chapter 1, Paperwork Management

(7) National Archives and Records Administration, Records Management Handbook, Disposition of Federal Records, 1992

**2. RESPONSIBILITIES**

The procedures of this handbook apply to all management and non-management levels within NCS who are assigned records management responsibilities. See NCS Directive 6300, Records and Information Management, for information on policy and responsibilities.



## **SECTION II - RECORDS CREATION**

### **1. PLANNING - INFORMATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

a. In planning information systems, whether automated or manual, the life cycle of the information must be considered. The life cycle of information has three primary phases -- creation, maintenance/use, and disposition. Maintenance and disposition of records are covered in Sections III and IV of this handbook.

b. The NCS official responsible for authorizing the establishment of an information system in VACO or in the field will plan for and document the life cycle of the information in the system prior to its implementation. The organization's Records Officer and the NCS Records Officer are responsible for appraising the records and listing them in the applicable Records Control Schedule (RCS) and will be involved in the planning process.

### **2. CREATION**

a. Records are usually created in the recording medium and format that meet NCS's administrative needs. Consideration must be given, however, to the length of time the records will be maintained to ensure that the information, and the technological methods and devices necessary to decipher will be available for its expected life.

b. In NCS, the Federal standards that apply to permanent records will be used for all information and records authorized for retention for 10 or more years without recopying if the information is in machine-readable form, unless an exception is authorized by the NCS and VA Records Officers.

### **3. DOCUMENTATION - OFFICIAL ACTIONS AND ACTIVITIES**

a. NCS officials are responsible for incorporating into the records of the Department all essential information on their major actions. Significant decisions and commitments reached orally or by informal electronic mail should be documented and included in the record. Minutes taken at board, committee, and staff meetings together with a copy of the agenda and all documents considered at or resulting from such meetings, should be made part of the record.

b. The programs, policies and procedures of NCS should be adequately documented in appropriate directives, and a record copy of each such directive and supporting documentation, including those superseded, should be maintained as a part of the official files.

c. Papers of a private or nonofficial character which pertain only to an individual's personal affairs that are kept in the office of a VA official shall be clearly designated by him or her as nonofficial and shall at all times be filed separately from the official records of the office. In cases where matters requiring the transaction of official business are received in private personal correspondence, the portion of such correspondence pertaining to the official's business shall be extracted and made a part of the official files.



### **SECTION III - RECORDS MAINTENANCE AND USE**

#### **1. MAINTENANCE**

The records and information collected and created by NCS must be maintained in a manner allowing ready retrieval whenever necessary throughout the approved life cycle of the information. The records and information must also promote application of authorized disposal requirements, including the identification and retention of records of permanent value. This is accomplished through the establishment and implementation of files management standards and procedures.

#### **2. USE**

a. The records and information of NCS must be protected and used, or disseminated or released only in accordance with applicable Federal laws and regulations. Refer to MP-1, Part I, Chapter 4, VA Public Affairs Policy and VA Handbook 6300.2.

b. Duplication, copying, and printing of records, information, and informational products will be in accordance with applicable Federal and Department regulations and policies. Refer to MP-1, Part II, Chapter 9, Printing and Reproduction.

c. The emergency-preparedness needs of the Department will be met through the identification of vital records and pre-positioning copies of them at strategic locations for ready accessibility in the event of a national or local natural or technological disaster. Refer to Section II of NCS Handbook 0320 and MP-1, Part II, Chapter 13.

#### **3. FILES MANAGEMENT**

a. Official file stations will be established and located at a point to provide optimum use and convenience.

b. Standard equipment and supplies stocked by GSA's Office of Federal Supply and Services will be used to the extent possible.

c. Official file stations will contain only official records. Nonrecord material, such as reading, chronological, or working files, may be kept for convenience of operation; however, they will not be interfiled with official records. Nonrecord material such as extra copies of correspondence, forms, notes, or published reference material such as pamphlets, magazines, or directives will also not be interfiled with the official records.

d. The VA Subject-Numeric Classification System will be used for all official file stations. This system provides for the classification, organization, and arrangement of files by subject utilizing a subject-numeric coding system. Refer to OI-1, Part I, Chapter 4, Appendix B.

e. Procedures for files organization, classifying and cross-referencing materials, filing, retrieval, charge-out, refiling records and information and other related issues are contained in OI-1, Part I, Chapter 4, Appendix C, Administration and Management, Veterans Administration File Maintenance System.

f. Guides and folders will be established only where file material exists under a primary subject. Guides and folders for secondary or further subdivisions of a primary subject will be prepared when the volume and necessity for detail dictates. It is not permissible to subdivide to tertiary or further subdivisions without maintaining a secondary subject folder; nor is it permissible to maintain folders classified under the secondary subject without primary guide and folder.

g. Permanent and temporary records will be filed in separate folders since each type of record has a different retention period:

(1) Permanent records will generally consist of all papers which document the history of the Department, including its organization, policies, directives, manuals, instructions, precedents, and legal status.

(2) Temporary records are those documents that decrease in value with the passage of time to the point where further preservation is not needed. These records have definite retention periods as shown in RCSs and will eventually be destroyed. The majority of all Federal records are temporary.

h. A new file folder will be established after a folder has become one and one-half inches thick (*3.81 cm*). Folders will then be renumbered to reflect 1 of 2 and 2 of 2 and so forth or broken out by months, e.g., January through April, May through August, and so forth.

i. The general administrative file will be cut-off at the end of each calendar year or fiscal year as appropriate and disposed of in accordance with current RCSs and OI-1, Part I, Chapter 2, and a new file folder begun. Material, such as project or case files required to be brought forward due to active transactions or documents whose reference value sufficiently warrants it, will be brought forward to the new files by indicating their location and existence in the cut-off files. Records disposition is covered in Section IV of this handbook.

j. VA Form 3-7298, Records Locator Inventory Card, will be prepared for each official file station designated within NCS VACO and the forms submitted to designated Records Officer for submission to VACO Records Management Section (033A4). Plain bond paper may be used by the field facilities (national cemeteries) and submitted to the appropriate NCAO. When files are cut-off, either at the end of the fiscal or calendar year and new files begun, an updated VA Form 3-7298 will be prepared.

## **SECTION IV - RECORDS DISPOSITION PROGRAM**

### **1. RECORDS DISPOSITION**

a. The systematic disposition of Federal records is an established part of records management and is needed to ensure that records are appraised, transferred, or disposed of efficiently and economically. The key to the disposition program is the RCS. RCSs provide a set of mandatory instructions for the disposition of records created or received by NCS. The disposition authority granted by schedules provides for continuous removal of unneeded records from offices. Comprehensive records schedules are a requirement of NARA's regulations (36 CFR 1228.)

b. Disposition requirements for records and information that are common to two or more Federal agencies are listed in the General Records Schedule (GRS) published by NARA. The disposition requirements of the GRS, including record retention periods, are mandatory for all agencies unless an exception is obtained from the Archivist of the United States. Citations from the GRS will be used in NCS RCSs as the authority for disposition of NCS records whenever applicable.

c. RCSs for NCS VACO, NCAOs, and National Cemeteries, dated March 1989, will be used to dispose of NCS records.

d. The records and information collected and created by NCS VACO and field in the conduct of official activities belong to the Federal government and not to the employee(s) who initiated the collection or creation. The legal authorization to destroy, sell, donate, assign, erase, or otherwise remove VA records or information must be obtained from the Archivist of the United States.

e. Unlawful removal and/or destruction of records in agency custody is governed by specific provisions of 44 U.S.C., Chapter 33 with criminal penalties provided for under 18 U.S.C. 2071.

f. All records maintained under the Subject-Numeric Classification System will be cut-off in annual blocks on December 31, or at the end of the fiscal year on September 30, as most appropriate. Records will be screened and disposed of in accordance with the appropriate RCSs by the office holding them. *(Screening consists of the removal of all nonrecord material attached to the records such as drafts, worksheets, notes, identical copies of the record, etc., and the removal of paper clips, rubber bands and clip binders.)* Action will be taken to remove less-active records to local storage; transfer inactive records to a servicing Federal Records Center (FRC); transfer permanent records to the National Archives; and destroy and document the destruction of records which have reached the term of their authorized retention period.

g. A VA Form 7468, Request for Disposition of Records, is used to request the storage, retirement or destruction of NCS records. A separate form will be prepared for each series of records requiring storage, retirement or destruction. Also, a separate form must be prepared and submitted for permanent and temporary records contained in the same series of records. Each VA Form 7468 must be accompanied by a sheet reflecting the content of each series of records that are to be stored or retired. The completed form will be submitted to your Records Officer for final processing. Records being processed for storage or retirement must be packed in authorized records storage boxes, Federal Stock No. 8115-00-117-8249 "Records Retiring" box. Refer to OI-1, Part I, Chapter 2, Disposition of Central Office Records for information on box preparation and other related matters associated with records disposition.

h. Records Management requirements for the disposition of electronic records are the same as those for records in paper or other hardcopy forms; however, there are significant considerations that are unique



to electronic records. A VA Handbook on electronic records is currently being written by the office of the Director, Information Management Service (045A4), and it will be published as a further breakdown of VA Handbook 6300.

## 2. INVENTORY

a. Inventorying involves distinguishing records from nonrecord materials for disposition purposes. Inventorying is one of the steps to follow in scheduling records.

b. All newly created and/or received records and information held in NCS offices and in field facilities will be inventoried by records series. Refer to NARA's Records Handbook, Disposition of Federal Records.

## 3. APPRAISAL

a. A careful and systematic appraisal of records is necessary to determine the appropriate disposition of all VA records. Such appraisals will form the basic determination that the material is of temporary record value or continuing record value. Retention periods for each category of material will be made upon the basis of individual appraisals. In determining whether a record should be permanent or temporary, the potential administrative, fiscal, and legal values must be examined.

(1) **Administrative Value:** A record has administrative value if it helps VA perform its current work or if it probably will help to perform future work. The primary administrative use of most records, however, is exhausted when the transactions to which they relate have been completed.

(2) **Fiscal Value:** Records of fiscal value are those which pertain to the financial transactions of an agency, such as budgets, ledgers, allotments, payrolls, and vouchers created as tools to administer the financial obligations of an agency. After such records are no longer required as administrative tools they keep their fiscal value and must be retained for a specified amount of time in the event they are required to protect the agency against court action or to account for the expenditures of funds.

(3) **Legal Value:** Records have legal value if they contain evidence of legally enforceable rights or obligations of the Government. Among records having legal values are those showing the basis for action, such as legal decisions and opinions; documents representing legal agreements, such as leases, titles, and contracts; and records of action in particular cases, such as claims papers and legal dockets.

b. After records are appraised, retention periods must be determined. All Federal records will either be permanent records or temporary records. Permanent records will generally consist of all papers which document the history of VA, including its organization, policies, directives manuals, instructions, precedents, and legal status. These records usually comprise about five percent of an agency's records. Temporary records are those documents that decrease in value with the passage of time to the point where further preservation is not needed. These records have definite retention periods and comprise about 95% of all Federal records. Responsibility for designating records as permanent rests with the NARA.

## 4. SCHEDULING

a. Scheduling records is the process of developing a document that provides mandatory instructions for what to do with records (and nonrecord materials) no longer needed for current Government business. This document is a RCS. Although special records are maintained separately from regular paper records, they too must be scheduled. Special records include but are not limited to electronic records, audiovisual records, and architectural and engineering records.



b. SF 115/115A, Request for Records Disposition Authority, will be used to schedule (1) all records not scheduled by the GRS and (2) all records scheduled by the GRS if an agency determines a different retention period is required. Other uses of the SF 115 are (1) to schedule records as permanent and (2) to convert unscheduled or permanent records to microform and then destroy the originals. SF 115/115A will be prepared by the office having jurisdiction over the records and submitted through the appropriate Records Officer to NARA within one year of the change.

c. The SF 115 is obtainable from GSA supply depots and stores and the blank SF 155A (Continuation Sheet) from NARA.



## **SECTION V - DEFINITIONS**

The definitions contained in this section are a partial listing of standard terminology in the RIM program used throughout VA. Definitions of additional terms pertaining to RIM may be found in 36 CFR, Chapter XII; in the "Records Management Handbook, Disposition of Federal Records," published by NARA; or in VA Handbook 6300.1, Records and Information Management Procedures.

**Active Records and Information** - Records and recorded information that are necessary for conducting the current business of an office and that must be maintained in office space and equipment because of their high reference activity. Also known as Current Records and Information.

**Chronological/Reading/Working Files** - Those files which consist of extra copies of correspondence or working papers, to include background material, notes, drafts, interim reports, etc., maintained solely to provide the at-hand informational and/or reference material needed in the day-to-day functioning of a particular element of a department or staff office, sometimes referred to as convenience files.

**Convenience Files** - Temporary files of informational papers, such as printed or duplicated copies of publications, extra copies of correspondence, completed forms, reports used as reading files, and other material considered as working papers, which are kept conveniently near the user(s) for immediate reference.

**Disposal** - Removal of records from Department control and authority by their sale, donation, or assignment of legal custody or title to others (Federal or non-Federal entities), or by their physical destruction, sale as waste material, or other forms of salvage or transfer. Included, is erasure of information captured or maintained on electronic media.

**Disposal Authority** - The legal authorization obtained only from the Archivist of the United States for the disposal of records and recorded information. Also known as Disposition Authority.

**Disposition** - An interim or final placement of records and recorded information, the actions taken with regard to records and recorded information to maintain them in a proper place following their appraisal, including the actions of retaining, transferring to a records center for temporary storage, transferring to an archival agency, donation to an eligible repository, image reproduction, or destruction; includes, but is not synonymous with "disposal."

**Disposition Authority** - (See Disposal Authority.)

**File** - An arrangement of records or recorded information, regardless of physical form or characteristics, accumulated or maintained in filing equipment, boxes, or machine-readable media, or on shelves, and occupying office or storage space.

**Inactive Records and Information** - Records and recorded information that are no longer required, used, or highly referenced in their present form in the conduct of current business of the agency and that can be relocated to another storage facility or destroyed in accordance with an appropriate disposal authority. Also known as Noncurrent Records and Information.

**Official File Station** - That area or those areas designated by a department for the maintenance of the official records of the department or staff office.

**Official Record** - That copy of a document, whether created or received, specifically intended to be kept as the record copy and maintained at the official file station. Official records include originals of incoming communications, initialed copies of outgoing correspondence, reports, executed forms, charts, maps, or other documentary material.

**General Administrative File** - Those files (records) which pertain to or document the overall functions, actions, and transactions of the department or staff office. These files are maintained under VA's Subject-Numeric Classification System.

**Nonrecord Material** - All informational materials that are determined to be disposable by the Department without the specific approval of the Archivist of the United States that are not included within the definition of the word "records." Specifically, this includes informational materials preserved solely for purposes of reference or exhibition in libraries or museums; extra copies of documents preserved only for convenience of reference (reading file and follow-up copies of correspondence, identical copies of documents maintained in the same file, extra copies of printed or processed materials of which official copies have been retained for purposes of record, etc.); stocks of publications and processed documents preserved for supply purposes; drafts, worksheets, and notes that do not represent significant basic steps in the preparation of record copies of documents, that were not circulated or made available to employees other than the creator, and that do not contain unique information that aids in the understanding of the Department's business that has not been made part of the official record; letters of transmittal that do not add information to that contained in the transmittal material; shorthand notes, stenotype tapes and similar secretarial materials, such as word processing disks/diskettes from which the information content has been transcribed or otherwise processed to provide official copies for purposes of record; and other material that has been determined to be nonrecord based on the appraisal procedures specified in this handbook.

**Permanent Records and Information** - In U.S. Government usage, records and information appraised by NARA as having enduring value because they document the organization and functions of the agency that created or received them and/or because they contain significant information on persons, things, problems, and conditions with which the Department dealt, and for which there is no plan for destruction. Also known as Archival Records and Information.

**Project/Case Files** - Those files (records) which pertain to specific functions, actions, transactions, persons, organizations, locations, places, or things which are part of the general administrative file but are maintained separately to facilitate ease of work in progress.

**Records** - In U.S. Government usage, "all books, papers, maps, photographs, machine-readable materials, or other documentary materials regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received by an agency of the United States Government under Federal law or in connection with the transaction of public business and preserved or appropriate for preservation by that agency or its legitimate successor as evidence of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the Government or because of the informational value of data in them." (44 U.S.C. 3301)

**Technical Reference Files** - Those files which consist of directives, publications, pamphlets, magazines, and other reference or informational material used in the conduct of operations but are considered to have nonrecord or nonofficial value. These files should be maintained separately from the general administrative file.

